

Department of Veterans Affairs

Strictly Speaking

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Hon. Anthony J. Principi
Remarks to the Distinguished Flying Cross Society
San Diego, California
December 12, 2004

Thank you for that kind introduction.

President Frantz, members of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society; my fellow veterans; ladies and gentlemen:

Seventy-seven years ago, in a rehabilitated tuna factory not far from here, a miracle of engineering, coupled with an indefatigable pioneering spirit and a “nothing-is-impossible” vision for success, produced an airplane destined for a pilot whose own destiny initiated a legacy for every member of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, and to every man and woman who earns the right to display the DFC on his or her uniform or lapel.

In 1927, San Diego’s own Ryan Airlines built the Spirit of St. Louis, and Captain Charles Lindbergh, a young Army Corps Reserve pilot, flew the Spirit across the country, across the Atlantic, and across history...alone...earning world praise, and the first Distinguished Flying Cross, presented by President Calvin Coolidge.

I’m proud to be here today...a citizen of the wonderful town that rightfully claims to be the birthplace not only of the Spirit of St. Louis, but also of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society, whose members represent the heroism and skilled airmanship of Freedom’s winged patriots.

President John Kennedy once said, “A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors...the men it remembers.”

America chose the Distinguished Flying Cross to honor and remember the men and women of courage and determination, who, aloft and face to face with Liberty’s enemies, placed the lives of others before their own...cared more for their crewmates than for themselves...thought nothing of personal consequence as they pressed into the challenge of combat to defeat Freedom’s foes.

During my service in Vietnam, I witnessed many times the heroic acts of aviators—rotary and fixed-wing alike—risking everything to save lives, to bring supplies to embattled outposts, to rescue downed pilots, to fly mercy missions to villages deep in enemy-held countryside.

I watched vulnerable FACs (forward air controllers) work down to the treetops to pinpoint targets for the fast-movers—who themselves often took such pains to be on target that they left themselves exposed to ground-fire and SAMS.

I was on the receiving end of support from slicks and gunships, and I saw first-hand the compassion and gutsy-ness of aircrews flying into the heart of darkness to snatch victory from defeat at great personal peril.

And I shared the sorrowful duty of placing the bodies of good men lost in combat on board a chopper for the first leg of their final trip home...and I remember, vividly, the tenderness and the dignity of the air crews as they carried out these painful missions...even in the heat of battle.

The dedication to honor and dignify their fallen comrades...or to protect the lives of soldiers in combat...or to stand in harm’s way to buy time for their fellow crewmen in moments of aerial crisis...are hallmarks of the men and women who proudly wear the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Of course, Vietnam was only one proving ground for the measure of the gallantry of DFC recipients. The skies above Europe, Africa, and the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans during World War II defined the limitless aerial arena in which bravery, skill, fidelity, and

sacrifice were common virtues among the tens of thousands of pilots, navigators, bombardiers, crew chiefs, and gunners who helped sweep tyranny into the dustbin of history.

To the Greatest Generation's aviators, the Distinguished Flying Cross was a four-bladed badge of honor, a silent, elegant acknowledgment of their love of country and of their clear vision for victory even through the flame and smoke of combat.

While I'm on the subject of the Greatest Generation, we too often forget the contributions of the women in uniform during World War II...but among the recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross is a woman from that generation who gave her life to relieve the suffering of others in the midst of war.

Only a few VA Medical Centers are entrusted with stewardship of the name of an American citizen-soldier. Our Saginaw, Michigan, Medical Center proudly bears the name of Lt. Aleda E. Lutz, an Army Flight Nurse in World War II who flew on more than 190 missions into combat zones to help evacuate and treat wounded soldiers.

In 1944, while on her 196th mission, Lt. Lutz, then only 29, died when her plane went down in Italy. Sixty years ago this month, Lt. Lutz was posthumously awarded the DFC...the first woman to be so honored for her bravery in combat. The Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center is the only VA facility named for a woman veteran.

The glow of professionalism and heroism shines just as brightly for the flyers who followed in the contrails of World War II aviators during the Korean War. The DFC honored the F-86 pilots and the carrier-launched Panther pilots flying jets in MiG Alley, or in troop support on the Korean peninsula during the Korean War...and the DFC recognized the heroism of the early MASH-unit support helicopter pilots whose missions of mercy in Korea broke new ground in battle front response times and lives saved.

From one edge of the Asian continent to the other, from 1951 to 1991 to 2001, the fight for freedom—from Korea to the Balkans to Afghanistan to Iraq—continues to elevate America's fighting men and women to heroic heights.

During Desert Storm, the DFC was a stirring symbol of the will of American aviators to break the chains of tyranny wrapped around Kuwait. Acts of aerial gallantry and skill, whether from the cockpit of an F-117 penetrating the nighttime skies over Baghdad, in B-52s hammering the Republican Guard, on board A-6s and F-111s suppressing Iraqi radar, or in Apaches and A-10s clearing out the armored threat, heroism in the fight to liberate Kuwait illuminated the true character of America's combat aircrews.

And now, today, in the skies over Southwest Asia—whether they're flying down in the narrow valleys, and high over the mountain ranges in Afghanistan, or patrolling the banks of the Tigris River, or airlifting food and supplies to meet the needs of Iraqi and Afghani citizens—our aircrews are pitting themselves against Freedom's arch enemies.

They are meeting the threats to Liberty head-to-head...unblinking in their commitment to help Iraq and Afghanistan emerge from the shadows of terror into the clear light of democracy and self-government.

Veterans who wear the DFC know the roots of liberty reach deep into the rich soil of Revolution. By securing America as a garden of hope and opportunity for 228 years, America's men and women in uniform make it possible for our society to till that revolutionary soil, cultivating fresh new ideas, nurturing visions, and promoting dreams.

In America's garden, we plant the seeds of promise and possibilities, and the fruits of our labors blossom into a bounty for all Americans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs grew from the seeds of a promise made by Abraham Lincoln..."to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan."

Lincoln's pledge, nurtured by a grateful nation and watered in the blood of patriots, has blossomed into a VA stronger today than at any other time in the history of our redemption of America's debt to her veterans.

Over the past four years, we have honored Lincoln's pledge:

By increasing the budget;

By expanding access to quality health care to a million more veterans than four years ago, and seeing 94% of them within 30 days of the time they seek care;

By improving our response to veterans seeking compensation for their disabilities, increasing the percentage who get answers from 40,000 to 70,000;

And by embarking on an 85% increase in the capacity of our National Cemetery system. The largest expansion since the Civil War.

From my conversations with Bob Frantz and Bob Jackson, I know the San Diego chapter of the Society is seeking new opportunities to join in fulfilling Lincoln's call to serve the band of brothers and sisters linked by experiences only veterans can appreciate.

Programs like Veterans Helping Veterans...veterans volunteering to assist housebound, homeless and disabled veterans and their dependents...present wonderful opportunities to reach out to your compatriots with the level of caring that has come to symbolize the compassion of the DFC Society. Thank you.

In closing, I reaffirm to you that today's VA is built solidly on a rich, time-honored commitment to redeem our nation's debt to our defenders. Through our commitment to excellence and service with compassion, we are meeting our obligation to you and your fellow veterans.

America's veterans were entrusted with the future of the garden of liberty. You ploughed it deep with your courage. You sanctified it with your blood. When the battle is joined, the trial of mortal combat in defense of Liberty elevates the price of freedom to the very heaven from which freedom comes. In so doing, even the most simple task performed in the service of a free society becomes a labor of inestimable value.

The fight for Liberty enables the beacons of great democracies to shine with renewed vigor, and bestows the opportunities and promises of a free and open society on even the smallest nation dedicating its native sons and daughters to Freedom's survival.

There is a light that guides free men into battle against tyranny, and those who have triumphed never forget that without the continued vigil of each citizen, the light of freedom itself will surely be lost in the darkness that follows.

Freedom's light swells in brightness under the care of the men and women who earned the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Your legacy shines on in the hearts and deeds of today's generation of sky-bound patriots whose aerial missions reflect the courage of Lindbergh, the compassion and commitment of Lt. Aleda Lutz, and the pride of the Distinguished Flying Cross Society.

Thank you and May God bless the United States of America and the men and women who defend her.

Hon. Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered at the Great Lakes National Cemetery
Groundbreaking Ceremony
Holly, Michigan
October 14, 2004

Senator Levin, Senator Stabenow, Congressman Kildee, Congressman Knollenberg, Congressman Rogers, distinguished guests, my VA colleagues, fellow veterans, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you, Congressman Rogers, for your kind introduction. As a former Army officer and leader, you learned first-hand the importance of honoring the citizen-soldiers whose shoulders bear the hard—and uplifting—work of freedom. I thank you for your own uniformed service to our country, and for your continuing service to democracy in the Halls of Congress.

It is a pleasure to join the people of Michigan in breaking ground for the newest of our Nation's most revered symbols of respect for the men and women who defend our liberty. It is also a privilege to be with Senators Levin and Stabenow and Congressmen Kildee and Knollenberg for our groundbreaking. I wish to express my deep appreciation to each of them for their steadfast support for the men and women in uniform and those who went before them.

Today's solemn event is the fruit of Michigan's lawmakers' hard fight for this National Shrine memorializing the service and sacrifices of the Great Lake State's uniformed patriots. I also want to express my gratitude to President Bush for his unwavering support as we embark on the greatest expansion of our National Cemetery System since the Civil War.

I also want to extend a special, and heartfelt, 'thank you', to Ms. Claudia Lee, our sign language interpreter. Ms. Lee's son, Sergeant Aaron Eckert, is serving today with the Army's Company C, 8th Engineer Battalion, in Iraq. Ms. Lee and Sergeant Eckert remind us that service to America is not solely the domain of our fighting men and women, but it is also found in the uncertain world in which their families live until their loved ones in uniform return. Thank you, Ms. Lee, for your family's service to the cause of freedom.

The Great Lakes National Cemetery Advisory Council, veterans' service organizations, community leaders, and local citizens spearheading the campaign for this everlasting field of honor must be credited with a real labor of love for the Michigan veterans who will one day be honored in the Great Lakes National Cemetery. It will stand forever, not only as a tribute to Michigan's sons and daughters in uniform, but also as a symbol of the pride and respect shared by their devoted and compassionate state.

William Gladstone, one of England's greatest Prime Ministers, once said: "*Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead, and I will measure exactly the sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.*"

Here in this new cemetery—in newly hallowed ground—we will pay homage to men and women who so valued America that they placed their lives at risk in the defense of generations of Americans to come. Here we will show our continuing loyalty to the ideals they fought for, and sometimes died for. Here we will show we care about them; and we will never forget the sacrifices they made for the rest of us.

This is a place where generations of families will come to visit and remember their loved ones. A shrine to the service and fidelity of Michigan's veterans. A place where the bodies and ashes of those who offered their lives for America will rest forever in honored glory.

At the dawn of our nation's history, during the Revolutionary War, the patriot Thomas Paine wrote: "*These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine*

patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

For more than two and a quarter centuries, America's servicemembers and veterans stood up for their country. They heard and responded to our nation's clarion call—the distant trumpet's cry to arms—whenever it came, and they went wherever they were sent in her defense. And, just as Paine prophesied, our nation has always shown them its love and gratitude. Our veterans are men and women who never failed to put the preservation of our country above the preservation of their own lives; their duty before their comfort; and their honor before everything else. Today, we break ground for a new place in their honor: a field sanctified by their service and now an eternal shrine reflecting our gratitude to them, and our acknowledgement that those who will rest here carried out their duty for our nation and its citizens.

All of the citizen-soldiers who leave the comforts of home, and the predictability of civilian life, for the terror of war and the capriciousness of battle, earn the love and thanks promised in Tom Paine's words. On Veterans' Day next month, we will pause to remember the millions of veterans whose lives sustained the flame illuminating the history of a free and independent nation.

Across America, we will gather by the thousands to honor our veteran soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen and their families. 25 million living veterans of World War II and Korea; of Vietnam and the Gulf War; of Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq...of wartime and peacetime service.

On that day, we honor our citizen-soldiers now living ordinary lives as grandparents, fathers and mothers, sons, daughters, friends and neighbors, businessmen and women, teachers, police officers, fire fighters, and members of the clergy.

Their commitment to America, expressed through the extraordinary demands of military service, earned the unique recognition and celebration for which we set aside the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

When it is time for the final celebration of their lives, we will honor them here, on days of sadness and days of triumph. We will stand softly by their graves and consider the service they so nobly offered on behalf of a free and grateful nation. And we will bring our children and our grandchildren, so they, too, can learn the lessons of patriotism, commitment to our Nation, and the values embraced by those who rest in honor in this cemetery.

In doing so, we will take our place in the long line of Americans who have understood that it is altogether fitting and proper that we honor what our veterans have done to secure the blessings of liberty for our Nation.

One of America's greatest orators, Daniel Webster, said: *"Those who established our liberty and our government are daily dropping from among us. The great trust now descends to new hands...We can win no laurels in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all...But there remains to us a great duty of defense and preservation; and there is opened to us also a noble pursuit to which the spirit of the times strongly invites us. Let our age be the age of improvement...and let us see whether we also, in our day and generation, may not perform something worthy to be remembered.*

"Let our object be our country, our whole country, and nothing but our country. And by the blessing of God may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument, not of oppression and terror, but of wisdom, of peace, and of liberty, upon which the world may gaze with admiration forever."

Today, we ask the same blessing—for ourselves, for our country, and for our world. Thank you.

Hon. Anthony J. Principi Secretary
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks as Delivered to OPM Workforce Management Conference
Baltimore, Maryland
September 9, 2004

An American statesman once said, “Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers. It may not be difficult to store up in the mind a vast quantity of facts within a comparatively short time, but the ability to form judgments requires the severe discipline of hard work and the tempering heat of experience and maturity.”

The tempering heat of experience and maturity is our charge as leaders of the federal workforce. It is incumbent on us...whether we are Cabinet Secretaries or department managers...to set today, by example and by training and mentoring, the path for the leaders of tomorrow’s public servants. How we do that is our common mission. As leaders, we are tasked to seek, and then follow, the best possible road toward improving the way we do business on behalf of our fellow citizens. We are guided by the precept that, though we are a nation of laws—enacted and enforced by the best intentions of our elected representatives—it is people who make those laws come alive.

Government is not an institution. Government is people. People who come to work every day in federal offices large and small, urban and rural, all across America, to meet our neighbors’ needs...to achieve something worthwhile...to make a difference in the lives of millions of our fellow Americans who look to us for security, for direction, for hope, for answers, and for help. Government is clerks, technicians, counselors, accountants, engineers, doctors, nurses, programmers, lawyers, artists, writers, scientists, analysts, and more.

Good government must be a renewable resource for Democracy. When the men and women who bring government to life are exposed to the tempering heat of experience and maturity...when they are recruited, trained, retained, and promoted based on their skills and performance...when they are inspired to succeed by compassionate mentors and accountable leaders, they create a continuum of service worthy of our founders’ ideals. Those of us entrusted with leadership at the federal level are blessed with our positions...we are stewards of the public trust. We are also charged with the mission to share the annealing effects of the tempering heat of our experience and maturity with the men and women who work for us and who will one day take our places in the ranks of leadership.

I am fortunate to lead the second largest civilian employer within the federal government...the 230,000 men and women of VA dedicated to fulfilling Abraham Lincoln’s promise “...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan.” We are very proud of who we are and what we do. We are housed in 162 medical centers, more than 856 outpatient clinics, 58 regional offices, and 121 National Cemeteries. But far beyond our physical presence throughout the nation, we represent America’s unequivocal commitment to the 25 million living veterans who secured the blessings of liberty we enjoy today.

The VA workforce is one of the most complex within the federal arena, with over 300 job series classifications spanning the broad range of professional, technical, administrative, clerical, and blue collar occupations. In addition, we are covered by two personnel systems, one established by Title 38 and the other Title 5. We are also a Department of choice for veterans beginning their careers after their military service. They not only bring their shared experiences in uniform to benefit our veteran clientele, they also bring a well-trained sense of leadership, discipline, maturity, and goal-oriented mission to their jobs. From health care to benefits to eternal shrines, all we achieve on behalf of our veterans must be credited to the men and women who dedicate their careers to meeting Lincoln’s promise and redeeming America’s debt to her veterans.

Over the past four years, VA's transformation has been guided by an outstanding cadre of leaders and managers who stayed the course throughout their careers. Every day, they apply the tempering heat of experience and maturity to develop the solutions we need to emerge from our old ways into our new days of this new century. And yet, even this cadre of leaders cannot be expected to carry the freight of our transformation indefinitely. VA, like so many of our federal partners, faces a workforce and leadership crisis unprecedented in our history.

Across the board, we are experiencing a graying of our technical, administrative, and senior leadership ranks. From 1992 to 2002, the federal workforce average age has increased, and our respective departments and agencies are feeling the effects. The average age of a VA employee in June 2004 was 47.4 years...and the average age of a new hire at VA is 40. In 1997, 8% of VA employees were eligible for regular retirement. By June 2004, 17% were eligible. By FY 2009, 30% will be eligible for regular retirement.

Of particular concern is our Health Administration. 53% of our Senior Executives, 41% of Chiefs of Staff and 31% of Nurse Executives were eligible to retire as of June 2004. VA-wide, 25% of all supervisors were eligible to retire as of June 2004 compared to only 11% in FY 1997. Though we have not yet experienced an exodus of our top leadership, we must prepare for that eventuality. In order to retain the tempering heat of experience and maturity crucial to annealing the youthful energy and drive of our newest employees into a stable, career-long commitment to public service, we are addressing tomorrow's workforce and leadership challenges today.

I believe it is incumbent on all federal agencies to adopt a three-part strategy...a vision for the future, if you will...that will position the federal government as an employer of choice, not only for first time employment, but as a career choice.

To begin with, federal agencies must have the authority to identify quality candidates, and we must be able to hire them quickly. If we expect to be competitive with the private sector, we cannot subject our best candidates to hiring practices they will perceive as a months-long wringer of bureaucratic process. This is a government-wide challenge.

Second...departmental leadership must establish performance goals at every level—from clerks to managers to senior executives—and these goals must be based on standards of excellence and positive outcomes for workers and the American people we serve. I have already seen the benefits of such standards and measures at VA: In 2001 half of our Veterans Benefits Administration's Regional Offices did not have performance standards. And our performance showed it. Over the past three years, VBA has increased the number of claims processed from 40,000 per month to 70,000 per month.

And, finally, we must be able to reward excellent performance and, conversely, to take immediate and decisive action to hold accountable leaders and employees who do not meet our performance standards.

To achieve those goals, we must implement the President's Management Agenda to recruit, train, retain, and promote our employees...and to prepare today's executives for the day in the not-too-distant future when we pass to them the torch of leadership.

One of VA's most successful programs for identifying and training potential leaders is Leadership VA, a free-standing executive development course in place since 1978. The most recent survey of LVA graduates indicate that 73% of VA's field-based SES incumbents are LVA graduates as are 63% of VA's central office-based SES force. I have no doubt programs similar to Leadership VA can boost leadership performance in every department, and I commend our model to all our colleagues.

It is not enough, though, to nurture leadership without addressing the concerns of the men and women considering federal employment and of our current employees who are deciding whether or not to stay with us. A strategy to reinforce the positives of federal employment while addressing the reasons why some employees decide to leave must be grounded in an understanding of the reasons for their decisions.

For example, in August, 2003, VA instituted the use of a voluntary VA-wide online entrance and exit survey to collect employment preference data. An analysis of the 15,000 surveys thus far collected in the database, show that the primary reasons why people choose VA, are mission and total benefits packages. Thus, we know that people are drawn to VA because of their desire to serve veterans. We also know that the Federal pay and benefits package, as a whole, are very attractive to prospective applicants. Mission and the employment package are points that we now emphasize more aggressively in our marketing efforts based on the survey results. The lessons of our surveys are instructive, and they are by no means limited to VA.

Our exit surveys tell us that 75% of those who left would consider working for VA again, while 37% could have been persuaded to remain with VA. We've learned that employees do not always leave because of job dissatisfaction and that constructive conversations between employee and their supervisors can persuade valuable employees to remain. These results apply throughout the government.

We also must emphasize that it is important for women and minorities to have the opportunities to attain, and succeed in, the high ranks of leadership, and it is incumbent on the federal government to build a capable leadership cadre reflecting the diversity of our country. We must recognize our strengths and weaknesses in creating an environment conducive to long-term career opportunities for women and minorities.

My Task Force on the Employment and Advancement of Women in VA, created in 2003, developed strategies to move VA into a position of leadership in the employment and advancement of women and minorities throughout the Department. Our strategies include increasing internal and external recruitment and retention programs; developing and enhancing mentoring, education, and training programs; and fostering a corporate culture that proactively reaches out to all candidates for senior-level positions.

I believe because we are VA, we have a special responsibility to veterans. To that end, we established our National Veterans Employment Program (NVEP) in June 2001 to work with representatives from transition assistance programs and educate VA hiring officials on hiring authorities streamlining the recruiting process for veterans. I cannot say enough about the effectiveness of this program and the outstanding outcomes we achieve by tapping the work ethic and commitment to service we find in the ranks of the men and women leaving military service. If your agency is not aggressively recruiting veterans, you are overlooking a resource rich in the possibilities for improving your outcomes for the American people.

VA aggressively applies as many workforce tools as we can to assure an unbroken chain of quality, timely, respectful service to the nation's veterans. We make a concerted effort to look far into the future for techniques and models that will help us meet our goals for the 21st Century. Again, our three part vision for the future--identifying quality employees and hiring them quickly; setting high standards, goals, and outcomes metrics at every level; and incentivizing excellence, while also addressing poor performance--will enable us to become the employers we need to be to serve the American people. One of those tools is OPM's USA Staffing, and VA is committed to applying USA Staffing to implement the President's Management Agenda, and automate our recruitment and staffing processes in line with the e-government initiative under the PMA.

I am very proud of VA's results with our workforce initiatives. Our leadership has been diligent in following every possible avenue of workforce excellence, and we are seeing the results. Our work is not done. None of us in federal leadership will be satisfied with our progress until we are all solidly "in the green" with OPM, and I have no doubt we are well on our way to achieving that goal through the severe discipline of hard work and the tempering heat of experience and maturity.

Robert F. Kennedy once said, "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."

One by one, nearly two-million federal employees are writing the history of our generation's commitment to the founding principles that enable all of us to live under a flag that stands for freedom, in land blessed with a bounty of liberties. And, in so doing, we bequeath a legacy of compassionate service to the next generation of leaders now following in our footsteps. Thank you.

Hon. Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks at Ceremonies Marking the 60th Anniversary Invasion at
Utah Beach, Normandy, France
June 6, 1944

Today we gather to honor those who liberated this great land. Many of you were with us just a few hours ago as President Bush and President Chirac met at Omaha Beach to speak of the bonds borne in battle.

Twenty years ago another great American traveled to Normandy to pay his respects. President Ronald Reagan, who passed away yesterday, understood the sacrifices made in Freedom's name. We mourn the loss of this great leader as we mourn the loss of all those who came to be known as the "Greatest Generation."

"Darkness enveloped the whole American armada. Not a pinpoint of light showed from those hundreds of ships as they surged on through the night toward their destiny, carrying across the ageless and indifferent sea tens of thousands of young men ..."

Journalist Ernie Pyle wrote these words to describe the start of the perilous and unparalleled endeavor to defeat a challenge unprecedented in America's 228 year history ...

To defeat an enemy that, one by one, had imprisoned Freedom's friends and America's allies behind the seemingly impregnable walls of 'Fortress Europe.'

Sixty years have now come and gone, and for Frenchmen and Americans everywhere, Ernie Pyle's words evoke, still, the ominous and heavy anticipation ... the chaos and confusion ... and the horror and heroism that would soon come to be bywords of the historic date— June 6th 1944.

"Heroism," has been called: "the brilliant triumph of the soul over flesh ... the [dazzling and] glorious concentration of courage." (Henri Frederic Amiel, Amiel's Journal, 1883) On this day, six decades past, blood ran as ink from a journalist's pen, to consecrate this hard-won soil and to chronicle great deeds of young Americans as they massed in a glorious concentration of courage ... to decide nothing less than the fate of Freedom.

As part of the greatest liberation force in human history ... you, America's heroes of that ordeal, united your strength – and your strength of purpose – on the windswept beachhead, just beyond, to accomplish your monumental mission.

Together with your brothers-in-arms, you responded to Hitler's aggression by answering the anguished cries of those who, for almost five long years, had desperately sought deliverance from aggression and tyranny. And so, from an ocean away, you courageously came here ... leaving behind family, friends, and loved ones ... and forging unbreakable bonds of comradeship cast from service to country. You came to save a nation of friends ... you came to save the world.

On these shores, you 'triumphed' beyond our Nation's deepest, most fervent hopes ... and you vanquished our most terrible and darkest fears. For a brief moment in history, you held America's destiny ... and the destiny of the world in your hands. And you did not fail us.

As June 6th dawned gray and stormy, the deafening roar of thundering guns and exploding bombs came together to herald a clash of mighty armies, giving substance to the irresolvable conflict between tyranny and freedom. The violent whirlwind of war rent the ground ... the sea ... and the skies in a desperate and furious struggle. An epic battle in which America's heroes pitched into the foam and fury of the dark sea ... and, loaded down with gear, struggled ashore to face head-on an entrenched enemy.

Heroes who dropped from a sky aglow with anti-aircraft fire, onto grassy fields filled with land mines. Men like Congressman Sam Gibbons who landed behind enemy lines not far from here.

Heroes who scrambled over the lifeless bodies of their comrades to overrun enemy machine gun nests. Heroes who doggedly punched through walls of barbed wire ... and blew up bunkers of concrete and steel.

Heroes who, in blood and suffering, persevered, undeterred, to secure the deadly beaches of Normandy in a heroic triumph of courage. When officers fell, sergeants took the lead. When sergeants fell, corporals led the way. When corporals fell, privates fought on. Those who survived were forever changed. Those who died stayed forever young. And for the people of Europe and America, those who served Freedom's cause will be forever honored.

The rhythmic sound of surf ... and the now silent dunes ... belie the death and destruction of 60 years past. Then, this strip of beach must have looked terrifying to those of you who fought here ... the 17-, 18-, and 19-year olds of yesteryear, who lost your innocence on this and other fiery battlefields of this beleaguered continent.

All those who came ashore at Normandy did so with raw courage and all-encompassing heroism—in a brilliant triumph of the soul over flesh. You did not cut and run ... you did not shirk from your duty. You did not allow fear to overwhelm you, though great fear there was. With one objective in mind you courageously proceeded to take this beach, yard by yard. With one goal squarely before you, you faced your challenges and overcame them.

The day's end was witness to demonstrations of valor, perseverance, and devotion the likes of which the world has never seen ... and which, perhaps, will never be bested. Each of you – each veteran of that historic campaign – is a living affirmation of America's deep and abiding heritage ... a living testament to the enduring legacy of patriots who stood to the last man or woman, if necessary, to defend Liberty and Justice.

Today, we commemorate the anniversary of the 'longest day,' whose passing minutes were counted in suffering and sacrifice ... and whose passing hours were measured in mud, heartache, and pain. That 'longest day' knelled out the 'beginning of the end' of World War II.

For another 335 days, the sun would rise on the fields of war before the guns fell silent. And during that time, across the forests and farms ... and the towns and cities of Europe, the steel of America's heroes would be hardened by the fires of adversity, again and again, from Bayeux to Berlin. Where each day of combat was reduced to its simplest terms—fight the enemy while separated from him by no more than ... a stone wall ... a pile of rubble ... the length of a bayonet—the simplest measures of battle spanning the narrow bridgeway between life and death.

On this day, in this place, as in so many other places across America and France, people struggle – as I do now – to find words that can give proper honor to your lives and to the memory of your lost brothers-in-arms ... knowing full well that words alone will not suffice.

This hallowed ground glorifies and memorializes the remarkable spirit and great deeds of ordinary Americans who served their country in the most extraordinary ways. My humble efforts to describe your courage in a desperate moment in history when Freedom hung in the balance, will inevitably fall short.

As it is a day of solemn remembrance, June 6th 2004 is also a day for celebration. A day of thanksgiving for lives of great accomplishment in the six decades that followed the mighty crucible that was Normandy.

America's beloved Greatest Generation – the generation of Normandy and Iwo Jima ... of Anzio and Midway – by the sheer magnitude of its larger-than-life achievements emblazoned itself across America's consciousness as none other than, perhaps, that of our Founding Fathers.

By the sterling example of your lives, you remind us who tread in your footsteps, of our Nation's bedrock values and quiet virtues ... of our basic sense of decency and fairness. You remind us that the righteousness of America's principles, ideals, and values overarch the anguish of our grievous losses. And you remind us that the price of Freedom is exacted with the coin of sacrifice ... and that Liberty is a legacy no debt can encumber.

It is fitting that, today, we who enjoy the fruits of your sacrifice should honor you, the heroes who toiled so long and suffered so much in Freedom's name. And while sixty years have passed since the dawn of that long-ago day when Good confronted Evil on this proud and ancient coastline—not one day in those six decades has gone by that France and America have not been thankful you were there to protect us ... to defend us ... to preserve all that we hold dear.

On behalf of President Bush ... on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs and all of America's veterans ... I extend to each of you all honors of a grateful Nation.

Men of Normandy ... patriots of historic ... dazzling ... and glorious courage ... I salute you!

Hon. Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered to the Midyear Board Meeting of American Ex-POWs
Arlington, Virginia
March 22, 2004

I am honored to be in the presence of citizen-soldiers whose sacrifices in the name of Democracy helped make it possible for us to meet today in a nation free from tyranny and overflowing with the blessings of liberty.

In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Profiles in Courage*, John Kennedy wrote, **“...without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should not forget those acts of courage with which men...have lived. A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.”**

American Ex-POWs are eloquent exemplars of President Kennedy's courageous men and women. You have been tested in the misery-ridden cauldrons of stalags and labor camps, and in the confines of tiger cages and concrete cells...and you emerged morally victorious in spite of personal consequences, obstacles, dangers, and pressures.

It takes courage to remain true to your country when every drop of water, every morsel of food, indeed, every breath you take, comes at the whim of your enemies. It takes courage to sustain the will to live and prevail in the face of starvation, mistreatment, torture, and random deaths. And it takes courage to sacrifice your own energy—perhaps your own life—on a death march supporting a buddy who would otherwise fall....and die.

Your experiences as prisoners of war were shaped on the anvil of sacrifice by a hammer of evil that more than one million American servicemen and women died selflessly to remove from the face of the earth. America's Ex-Prisoners of War know the sting of that hammer...You felt its bitter and merciless cold...You ached from its festering wounds...You suffered its lingering diseases...And you experienced the brutal isolation from day and night and time itself.

And yet through it all...through the pain and the fear and the deprivation... you stood tall and never gave up and never gave in. No matter how tough the going got, you never let down your faith in all you believe about America.

How can a grateful nation ever repay such sacrifice?I ask that question often, and I am proud to lead the Department charged with making good on Abraham Lincoln's promise **“...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan.”** Today, more than ever in VA's history, we are committed to redeeming our Nation's debt to the men and women who endured imprisonment at the hands of liberty's enemies.

I know, as you do, that nine out of ten former POWs are World War II and Korean War veterans well into their 80s. Even our Vietnam Ex-POWs are approaching, or are in, their 60s and facing their own mortality in the decades to come.

I am directing a coordinated, nationwide public affairs and outreach campaign to get the word out to former prisoners of war, their families, and their communities that they may be entitled to certain VA benefits and services.

We need to let former POWs know that 20 years of legislation has expanded and improved their benefits. Many POWs may not be aware of the benefits for which they are eligible, even if they are currently receiving compensation.

We are counting on veterans' service organizations, our own employees, and the news media to get the word out.....that now is the time for former POWs to learn more about VA benefits and services so they can apply and enroll.

More than 21,000 former prisoners of war already receive some form of compensation from VA. There are, however, many who do not. This past year, VA mailed information about benefits to another 4,700 known ex-POWs not on our rolls. However, we estimate there could be as many as 11,000 more POWs for whom we do not have an address.

We need your help, as the lead VSO for Ex-POWs, to reinforce VA's outreach effort, and I know I can count on you to get the word out through your own internal communications and your extensive community links around the country. Each VA Regional Benefits Office and VA Medical Center has a former POW coordinator on staff to help.

I encourage your members to seek out our coordinators for the latest information on benefits and health care. And VA medical centers have former POW clinical treatment teams ready to help any ex-POW who needs our assistance.

Again, I thank the American Ex-POWs for all your support over the past three years.

You have been a stalwart ally as I worked to reinvigorate VA and earn our veterans' faith that their Department is listening to them and responding with the best health care, the most timely benefits, and the enduring pledge of noble honors in our National shrines.

In closing, let me turn to Lincoln, who during his life, often expressed his heartfelt appreciation to individual soldiers, officers, and military cadres for their service.

In a speech in Washington, DC in the closing months of the Civil War, he observed— "... it has been said, all that a man hath will he give for his life; and while all contribute to their substance the soldier puts his life at stake, and often yields it up in his country's cause. The highest merit, then, is due the soldier."

Whether in the Civil War or the war on terrorism, the greatest tribute belongs to the American soldier ... sailor ... airman ... marine ... and coastguardsman whose indomitable spirit, buoyant optimism, and unwavering courage are the lifeblood of American democracy. And no tribute is more deserved than the tribute America owes our Ex-POWS....you made the blessings of Freedom possible ... for America and for others. My Department has no greater *cause*—no more sacred responsibility—than to serve those who have so courageously *borne the battle*.

VA and American Ex-POWs are linked by unbreakable bonds of mutual respect, friendship, and a shared noble purpose ... I continue to be proud of our enduring partnership on behalf of America's veterans. We are faithfully pledged to succeed in our mission if we are to leave as our legacy the honor of a redeemed promise to those who serve our Nation so well.

Thank you.

Hon. Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered to the Compensated Work Therapy
Supported Employment Training
for Mental Health Staff Conference
Washington, D.C.
October 27, 2004

I want to thank Dr. Jonathan Perlin, Acting Under Secretary for Health, for his support of the CWT program. I also want to mention the good work of the members of Secretary Principi's Mental Health Task Force. They did an excellent job in preparing their recommendations for improving the delivery of mental health care to our Nation's veterans.

I particularly want to acknowledge the outstanding work of Dr. Miklos Losonczy, who served on the Secretary's Task force on Mental Health, and served as the chair of the subcommittee on Serious Mental Illness.

And to each of you here in the room today ... whether you are a CWT program staff member, a mental health facility leader or a VISN mental health leader ...

I commend you for the outstanding work that you do each and every day in support of the health and welfare of our Nation's veterans. Secretary Principi and I appreciate all that you do.

The New Freedom Commission on Mental Health

Two years ago, when President Bush announced the creation of his New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, he said "... we must work for a welcoming and compassionate society, a society where no American is dismissed, and no American is forgotten."

An important part of the New Freedom Commission's goal was to ensure that adults with serious mental illness could participate fully by living and working in their communities. This goal has added significance for America's veterans – many of whom have the added burden of combat injuries or combat-related traumatic stress.

The training you are receiving this week is important for the roll-out of Supported Employment at the more than 100 VA Compensated Work Therapy programs nationwide.

With your help, we will add 30 CWT programs with Supported Employment to mental health departments that do not already have them. With your help, we will increase the ability of veterans to integrate into the workforce. And we will promote increased access to daily community life.

The addition of Supported Employment as a clinical model has been shown to be effective in improving employment outcomes for people with serious mental illness. While specialized funding has previously been provided for addictive disorders, PTSD and homeless veterans, Public Law 108-170 offers the first specialized funding earmarked exclusively for veterans with serious mental illness. This allocation comes at a time of unprecedented recognition of the recovery potential for those with serious mental illness.

Transformation of VA Mental Health Care

We are in the midst of a transformation in VA's mental health care. At today's VA, we are committed to treating the whole person. Through VA's new Action Agenda, we are adopting a vision of a more recovery-oriented mental health system.

Each of you contributes an important part to that transformation. Thanks to your dedicated efforts, the U.S. Congress has heard of Compensated Work Therapy and Public Law

108-170 recognizes all your hard work. The Secretary and the Acting Under Secretary for Health both recognize and appreciate your hard work. As a result, Dr. Perlin has approved \$6 million to be used to establish one CWT program in each VISN to serve as a mentor/training program for Supported Employment. And \$6 million has been approved for this purpose for each of the next three fiscal years.

These programs will do two things. First ... they will implement the Supported Employment model within the structure of the CWT program. And second ... they will train existing and future CWT program staff within the VISN in the operation of CWT and the provision of Supported Employment.

The good news doesn't end there.

VA's Task Force on Mental Health Services recommended – and Secretary Principi directed – the distribution of an additional \$6 million each year for the next three years ... for the purpose of expanding the provision of Supported Employment to the remaining CWT programs. The Secretary also directed the distribution of \$4 million to establish new CWT programs in VHA Mental Health programs that do not currently operate CWT programs.

These expenditures will help get the program off the ground, and ensure that veterans with mental illness have access to vocational opportunities through transitional and Supported Employment.

In another step forward, the VHA Office of Research and Development is providing more than \$2 million to fund a 5-year research study on the effects of participation in CWT and Supported Employment for veterans with Spinal Cord Injury. The funding to roll-out the program is there.

We know that our veterans want to work. So our goal is to match the veterans' desires and goals, and establish the appropriate accommodation that will allow them to work.

Today, I want to charge each of you with helping those veterans who have the interest ... make their way into the competitive workplace. We need to encourage the veterans in our care ... let them know that they don't have to go out on their own. We are there to help them ... whether it's negotiating employment conditions such as days and hours or finding the right job. The veteran's desire to work can be met through the supportive model ... through an intermediary who translates their interest into a relationship with an employer.

It's not just the veteran who benefits from the Supported Employment program. VA benefits too. For every dollar that VA spends operating Compensated Work Therapy, the veteran earns \$2. Last year, CWT brought in \$40 million; the cost to VA was \$20 million. While this doesn't help VA's budget, it does go to help veterans.

And it isn't just the veteran and VA that benefit. We know that corporations and businesses want to hire our veterans. Businesses want to hire good employees and they also want to be good corporate citizens.

VHA in the Forefront

VHA has always been in the forefront of healthcare delivery. And with this Supported Employment model we are unique in its deployment. Only VHA has this integration of the transitional and the Supported Employment models. With VA's integrated CWT and Supported Employment program, the veteran can step back from competitive work to transitional work and maintain a stream of income.

The important step in all of this is that we offer to engage veterans in the work environment as soon as they are interested. In the supported work environment, this has been shown to produce better outcomes. This enables us to better serve veterans by keeping them working and helping them to normalize their lives and make choices that are based on a future sense of benefit and gain.

We have embarked on a transformation of mental health care in the Department of Veterans Affairs. We have made a commitment to provide a full continuum of compassionate care to veterans with mental illness.

We must help our patients function at an optimal level, and we do that by enabling them to take responsibility for their own lives. By using the Supported Employment model, we assemble the pieces that help the individual return to work.

You are the people that can make this happen. I want to thank you – your efforts in the past have led to this change of law and given us the opportunity to do more in the future. The next step is to help those veterans who want to work ... to do just that.

In closing, I ask that your thoughts and prayers be with our troops in the field – our future veterans – the men and women who are fighting terrorism around the globe. May God bless our troops. And may God bless America

Hon. Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered at the Mental Illness Awareness Week Program
VA Medical Center, Washington, D.C.
October 5, 2004

Thank you Mr. Garfunkel for your warm introduction. And thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I also want to thank you and your planning committee for organizing this observance of Mental Illness Awareness Week.

I am sure that each of you was as moved by the narratives of those six veterans as I was. It is a unique journey that each of these veterans has undertaken. Each brought a powerful message of hope and recovery, and that is one of the things that brings us here together ... to meet the challenge of mental illness and celebrate recovery.

Mental Illness Awareness Week is an important national observance that was established by Presidential proclamation in January 1990 to focus attention on the high incidence of mental illness in America. This observance encourages people with mental illness to seek treatment for mental health problems with the same urgency as they seek treatment for problems with their physical health.

Mental illness is a challenge that millions of Americans face every day. Many of these illnesses are disabling. The U.S. Surgeon General's report on mental health finds that about one in five Americans experiences a mental disorder in the course of a year. Mental illness affects almost every American family.

These illnesses can affect a person from any cultural, racial or ethnic background. And just as they affect the individual, they also affect our families and the communities in which we live.

Decade of the Brain

Following the Presidential proclamation of 1990, the decade of the 1990s was designated the "Decade of the Brain." And during that decade, we expanded our understanding of how the brain works.

Genetic discoveries have revealed that more than half of the human genome is composed of brain-related cells, and these genes influence a range of behaviors. New scanning technologies have enabled us to observe brain activity as it happens. So brain research is continually moving us closer to sound medical solutions for treating and living with severe mental illness.

Despite these and other discoveries about the brain, we still have much to learn. And the need for continued research is compelling—millions of Americans are affected each year by disorders of the brain.

The Transformation of Mental Health Care in VA

We live in an age of new beginnings. In these early years of the 21st century, we have embarked on a transformation of mental health care in the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We are changing our approach. We have a new understanding of mental illness. We know that many mental illnesses are biologically-based brain disorders. We are assessing the availability and adequacy of mental health services in VA. We have made a commitment to provide a full continuum of compassionate care to veterans with mental illness.

We are also developing a comprehensive overall strategic plan for VA mental health care services. This strategic plan will guide our progress toward transforming mental health care in VA.

We must constantly remind ourselves that the goal of this transformation in VA's mental health care system is healing and recovery. We are now in the decade of recovery.

Instilling Hope and Fostering Recovery

In order to move forward with this transformation, we must never underestimate the potential of the human spirit ... for healing and for renewal. For us to instill and impart hope to others, we must all of us in the health care system harbor and nurture that same hope.

And when we do – we embrace a profound truth ... that people can heal ... that people can change. The narratives of recovery that you heard this morning from seven of our veterans are powerful testimonies of hope and renewal. It has been said before that hope has the power to sustain. And hope lays the groundwork for healing to begin.

We are now in the decade of recovery. And recovery is all about healing. Recovery is a process through which veterans recover their self-esteem and a sense of self-worth. Recovery is the process by which a veteran regains a measure of pride, choice and dignity.

If we are to transform our health care system, we must look at recovery as a process of treating the whole person. We must help our patients function at an optimal level, and we do that by enabling them to take responsibility for their own lives.

For centuries, our society has denied hope for people with mental illness. There was a time when those with mental illness were institutionalized and then forgotten. When we allow anyone in our care to remain without hope, we are repeating the mistakes of the past.

The promise of recovery can undo this.

It has been said that “recovery is about the stories of individuals ... because each person's journey is unique and special.” And so the narratives that you heard this morning are especially poignant.

Today, we are pushing back the walls of intolerance and misunderstanding. We are rolling back the harsh words of fear and stereotyping. And in so doing we are removing the stigma attached to identifying and treating those among our families and friends who experience mental illness at some time in their lives.

The Crippling Effects of Stigma

To meet the challenge of mental illness, we must defeat the stigma that is associated with it. Stigma isolates people, and discourages them from reaching out for the treatment that might bring them relief from mental illness. Stigma prevents many people from seeking help out of the fear that the confidentiality of their diagnosis or treatment will be compromised.

The power of stigma is such that it often prevents people from acknowledging their own mental health conditions.

Stigma takes many forms. It can appear as simple fear or distrust. Or it may manifest itself as prejudice and discrimination. Stigma can be stereotyping. It can be a few thoughtless comments that undo months or years of work. It also causes many people to avoid finding a job or having a social life.

We must do all we can to ensure that each and every VA employee understands what mental illness is. And we must do all we can to eliminate the crippling effects of stigma. That means dispelling the myths about mental illness, and providing accurate knowledge to ensure more informed care providers and patients alike.

I am grateful for this opportunity to join you here today for this observance of Mental Illness Awareness Week. It is important that we call attention to mental illness and the possibility of recovery.

I would like to thank each of the veterans who shared their personal narratives of recovery with us today. It takes a lot of courage to stand up in front of your peers and the others who are here today, and describe such intimate experiences.

Today we understand that “recovery is a profoundly social process.” This is why the effects of stigma can be such an obstacle. It is precisely because much of what is being recovered ... in recovery ... is “a way of being in the company of others.”

Today, some of you spoke here in the company of others. And it is my sincere hope that your story will be the starting point for others who are beginning their own journey of healing and recovery.

Hon. Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks to the VA Quality Symposium
Washington, D.C.
September 28, 2004

Good morning. In lieu of being present with you in person today, I wanted to at least take this opportunity to communicate with you. I am a strong supporter of the Carey Awards and I am glad to have this opportunity to speak with you.

Over the past thirteen years, our Department has strengthened its commitment to quality improvement by embracing and internalizing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award concept. VA was the first federal agency to do that. The award we established in Bob Carey's name is a tribute to his accomplishments, which demonstrated that the culture of quality management could indeed be transplanted from the private sector into the federal workplace. It did not take long for the Carey Awards to become a symbol of excellence in VA. Today, the Carey Awards are an inspiration for management teams at all types of VA facilities to improve the way that they do business.

Your path to this symposium has not been easy. I know that. And I want to thank all of you for your hard work and your determination to succeed. It is your commitment to organizational excellence and your involvement in the Carey process that is improving our ability to deliver the world-class healthcare services and benefits that our veterans deserve. This morning I want to thank the team in Gary Steinberg's Office of Planning and Evaluation.

I think we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Gary, and to Scott Holliday, Darine Prok, Eric Malloy and Gwen Young. They have done an outstanding job in organizing this year's symposium. And I understand that Marty Reiss had the lead in putting the symposium together. Thank you Marty!

I also want to thank AFGE for their support of the National Quality Council, which helped plan this event. In particular, I want to thank Curtis Jackson for all of his help. Gary Steinberg tells me that this year's symposium is something special. Not only is this the fourth Quality Symposium, but it is also the largest ... with nearly 200 participants.

To our knowledge, we are one of the only agencies in the federal government that has a symposium of this type.

The Seven Steps to Success

And a special feature of this year's symposium will be presentations by five Baldrige Award winners from 2003. I think this is a tremendous addition to the agenda. You will hear Baldrige Award and Carey Award winners talk about their experiences with the organizational assessment process, and I am certain that their comments will resonate with the experience that you have had over the last few years. You will hear about the Seven Steps to Success -- the seven criteria categories that are used to evaluate applicants for the Carey award. These are the same seven categories that the National Institute of Standards and Technology uses to evaluate applicants for the Baldrige Award.

Keep in mind that these speakers represent the best in the private sector, and the best in the VA. I think you will see that both are excellent. Here are the **Seven Steps to Success** in the Baldrige/Carey Organizational Excellence Criteria.

- First is **Leadership** – Here the criteria cover mission, values, vision, organizational expectations, periodic performance review, governance and social responsibility.

- Next is **Strategic Planning** – This category includes strategic objectives, action plans and key performance measures.
- Then, **Customer and Market Focus** – This one describes how the organization determines requirements, expectations, and preferences of customers and markets.
- Then we move to **Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management** – This category describes how the organization selects, gathers, analyzes, manages and improves its data, information and knowledge assets, and how it uses data to make informed decisions.
- We then move to **Human Resource Focus** – The Human Resource Focus looks at how work is designed to motivate and enable employees to reach their full potential. It addresses how the work is aligned with business plans in order to build and maintain an environment conducive to performance excellence and to personal and organizational growth.
- The area of **Process Management** – This category examines key aspects of an organization's process management. All key processes are assessed on how well they are defined and documented, how they are monitored and whether they are continuously improved.
- **Business Results** – This category summarizes the organization's performance and improvements in areas of customer satisfaction, product and service performance, financial, human resources, governance and social responsibility.

Those are the *Seven Steps to Success* in the Carey/Baldrige process. You will hear a lot more about each of these subjects from the experts ... from your peers, as the day unfolds. I realize that the Carey Award process is challenging. It requires a lot of work by the leadership in each organization, and the organization as a whole ... and that includes our union partners.

It requires a lot of introspection, because you must look at your organization in an honest way. And it also requires a willingness to listen to feedback from experts on the strengths in your organization, as well as the opportunities for improvement in the seven criteria areas. And then there are the plans for improvement. You must develop an implementation plan that will address organizational weaknesses.

Clearly, this is not a one-year process. Our Carey Award winners this year have been participating for three years. And some of them have competed in other programs. As a department, we have said that we embrace this process. And we have had more than 200 applications over the 13 years of the program.

But this year, we only had 18 organizations submit a formal application.

Unfortunately, the number of organizations that use these criteria for assessment and continuous improvement is not as many as we would like.

I think this poses a real challenge for our Department. We really should be using this tool as a fundamental way to understand more about ourselves. To truly embrace the process, we need far more of our organizations to go through the process either formally or informally. Even though we are doing great things, we must always look for ways to improve delivery of health care, benefits and memorial affairs.

Ultimately, the Carey Award is not just an award. And I know that I am preaching to the choir here. All of you are engaged, and you are committed to using the Carey Award process to

improve service to veterans. I want each of you to become an ambassador. We need to get the word out at the medical centers, the regional offices, in our cemeteries and in the staff offices.

As you listen to the Baldrige winners and your colleagues share their experiences here at the symposium, I want each of you to consider ways that you can help spread the word about the Carey process, and the transformation that is underway at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I hope that every VA employee will have the opportunity to experience your passion for providing veterans with the world-class care they earned through their service and sacrifice.

Thank you for your commitment to excellence. And thank you for everything you do, each and every day, on behalf of our veterans.

Hon. Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered at the Dedication Ceremony for the
Berkshire Veterans Residence
Pittsfield, Mass.
September 23, 2004

Good morning. Thank you Mr. Downing [Executive Director, United Veterans of America], for your kind introduction. And thank you for inviting me to speak here today.

First, let me say what an honor it is to participate in the dedication of a new facility for veterans. The dedication of this facility is an important step forward for homeless veterans in Western Massachusetts. And Secretary Principi and I are glad that the new Berkshire Veterans Residence has become a reality.

And second, I want to tell you what a special treat this is for me to return to the city of my birth. I have many special memories of the city of Pittsfield, and it is a pleasure for me to be with you today. I understand that James Ruberto, the Mayor of Pittsfield, is a graduate of my old alma mater.

Now some of you may be wondering if he's talking about North Junior High School, but right now I'm thinking of ... Villanova University. The mayor and I are both Villanova Wildcats. Mayor Ruberto, it's good to be back here in Pittsfield. It was a pleasure to see you last night.

You know, it isn't every day that a public servant has the privilege of returning to their childhood home and speaking before an audience that easily includes a former neighbor or a school classmate. And definitely includes relatives. Hello to the cousins!

VA Supports the President's Compassion Agenda

Many of you here today are aware of President Bush's commitment to end chronic homelessness in the United States by 2012. This is part of the President's agenda for Compassionate Communities. This morning I would like to reaffirm the Department of Veterans Affairs' ongoing effort to help the President end homelessness in America, especially for our Nation's veterans.

At VA, we continue to allocate resources for programs directly related to providing services and benefits to homeless veterans. The total costs for health care and transitional housing for homeless veterans are projected to grow to nearly \$1.5 billion in Fiscal Year 2005. I think that gives you an idea of the commitment we have to ensuring that our homeless veterans get another chance.

We have a lot of statistics, but it really is about helping veterans reclaim their lives. It's about veterans getting sober ... veterans getting straight ... and veterans getting their own place to live.

It's about helping the veterans who will be treated here taking personal responsibility for getting a job and reuniting with family members.

At VA we are working with partners at the federal, state and local levels and with faith-based and other community providers to ensure that homeless veterans have access to a full range of health care, benefits and support services. It is only through collaboration and innovation that we can maximize our opportunities for success.

Homelessness is a challenge for the entire community. And it is in all of our best interests to seek creative partnerships in the struggle to build capacity and identify resources that will help eradicate homelessness ... especially among veterans.

This is why we value our partnership with the United Veterans of America, Inc. This partnership has produced 120 beds in transitional housing on the campus of the Northampton VA Medical Center. And here today, as we dedicate this new Berkshire Veterans Residence, we take another step forward in caring for homeless veterans in Western Massachusetts.

I want to congratulate Gary Burt, the President, and Jack Downing, the Executive Director, of the United Veterans of America, Inc., for their outstanding effort in working with Mayor Ruberto and other city officials to transform this property into an appropriate transitional residence for homeless veterans. This facility will add valuable capacity for housing and other services for the veterans in Pittsfield and surrounding areas.

Homeless Veterans in Western Massachusetts

The need is here. The estimated number of homeless veterans here in the Tri-County area and Berkshire County combined is just over 1,000. The United Veterans of America offers one of the largest veteran-specific programs in the country.

In its partnership with VA, United Veterans is providing homeless veterans with a continuum of care that includes immediate and long-term housing, treatment and recovery for addiction ... food, clothing, medical and counseling services ... as well as educational and job training services. They are meeting a significant need.

The United Veterans have received four separate grant awards from VA, going back to 1998. One was to renovate space at the Northampton VA Medical Center to house 60 veterans. Another was for the acquisition of a van to provide transportation for homeless veterans. In 2003, VA awarded per diem only funds to provide housing for 60 homeless veterans at the Northampton VA Medical Center. Last year, VA awarded funding to acquire the present building in Pittsfield for renovation. United Veterans has received nearly \$1 million, and authorization to receive per diem payments.

VA and Homeless Veterans

Across the nation, VA has awarded more than 300 grants to public and nonprofit groups to assist homeless veterans in 50 states and the District of Columbia. These groups provide transitional housing, service centers and transportation to services and employment.

In the last 10 years, VA has awarded 26 of those grants in the state of Massachusetts. Of those, 19 grants were capital awards for brick and mortar totaling \$4.2 million. And seven of the grants were for vans to provide veterans with transportation to medical appointments ... to employment ... and to simply reach out and bring these veterans to a place like the Berkshire Veterans Residence where help and healing are available.

VA is currently authorized to support nearly 400 beds in Massachusetts, and of those, 45% will be operated by the United Veterans of America. So they are a significant provider, not only in Massachusetts, but in New England and the United States as well.

VA operates an extensive program that provides health care services to more than 100,000 homeless veterans annually. More than 15,000 will be seen and treated in transitional housing across the country at programs like United Veterans.

Since 2001, VA has increased homeless veteran-specific spending for the Homeless Grant and Per Diem program by nearly double, to \$70 million in 2003. What we are doing here is significant, but it is a small part of our overall effort. That \$70 million in spending for per diem payments is a portion of VA's extensive \$1.5 billion we expect to spend on behalf of homeless veterans.

And we match our efforts to provide health care with benefits assistance. Approximately 40% of veterans receiving healthcare are also receiving benefits they have earned in their service

to our country. This effort I am describing is embodied in the program we are celebrating here today.

In addition, in Fiscal Year 2003, VA, HUD and HHS developed a collaborative program that provides permanent housing with supportive services to chronically homeless people totaling another \$35 million annually. VA community service provider grants have now been expanded to all 50 states.

VA is the lead department in helping homeless veterans. Through the first nine months of this year, VA Homeless Veterans Outreach Coordinators contacted 2,700 shelters and 3,250 other agencies dealing with homeless individuals.

More than 6,000 homeless veterans were referred to VA health care and the Department of Labor for assistance with obtaining employment. More than 23,000 homeless veterans sought assistance from VA regional offices and more than 40,000 formerly homeless veterans are now receiving benefits. From outreach ... to health care ... to housing ... to benefits ... we are committed to creating a strong partnership.

And that partnership is exactly what we celebrate here in Pittsfield today -- the beginning of a new partnership with United Veterans. Our efforts across the country are paying dividends with new, strong, creative partnerships that will help tens of thousands of veterans return to the life they deserve -- a life that is built on hope and dignity for a better future.

Interagency Council on Homelessness / Federal and Local Relationships

VA participates in the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to further collaborative efforts in support of homeless veterans. Secretary Principi now serves as the Chair of the Council.

VA has worked closely with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services on an initiative to assist the chronically homeless with housing, health care and benefits coordination. Under this initiative, \$35 million has been provided to 11 communities that developed quality plans to house and serve many of our Nation's most needy.

Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program

This past year, the VA Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program achieved one of our key goals which was to authorize funding for at least one transitional housing program in each state. This is a significant milestone.

We also targeted funding to States that had limited or no veteran-specific transitional housing program. With the strong leadership of President Bush and Secretary Principi, we have been able to take this program and increase the number of beds for homeless veterans almost threefold in three years.

There are now 10,000 beds authorized in the United States. That may not seem like a lot, but that means that programs like United Veterans will help us see 25,000 to 40,000 veterans in transitional housing in the future.

It has been a pleasure for me to join you here today for the dedication of this important new transitional facility for homeless veterans in Pittsfield and Western Massachusetts.

It makes me think of what I have recently been involved in:

- Dedication of the World War Two Memorial in Washington, D.C.
- Dedication of a plaque in Rome celebrating the 60th anniversary of the liberation
- Dedication of a memorial to the World War Two Rangers
- Dedication of a statue two weeks ago to Navajo Codetalkers

But this is the dedication of a living memorial to the veterans and to the partners – United Veterans of America and volunteers. We still have much to do to end chronic homelessness among veterans in America.

The Berkshire Veterans Residence will serve as a beacon of dignity and hope. There is a code that our soldiers in combat live by. And that is that we don't leave our wounded behind. Sometimes at great risk, and sometimes at great cost, we go back into dangerous places under adverse conditions to retrieve our comrades.

Here in Pittsfield, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the United Veterans of America are going into the battle to bring back those who are "Missing in America." We are reaching out to our "Forgotten Heroes." As a Department, we have not forgotten.

There are those heroes who are on the streets, under the bridges and in the woods. We want to bring them back to rejoin the society they fought to preserve and protect.

I am glad to have had this opportunity to come back to my birthplace. And to those veterans who are homeless today, but who will walk through the doors of the Berkshire Veterans Residence and one day find their way, I have a short message for you – "Welcome Home."

As I close I ask you to give your thoughts and prayers to our soldiers fighting for freedom throughout the world – God bless them and God bless America.

Hon. Gordon H. Mansfield
Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Remarks Delivered to the American GI Forum National Convention
Frankenmuth, Michigan
August 7, 2004

Buenos tardes

It is an honor for me to join the men and women of one of America's premier veterans' family service organizations ... the American GI Forum of the United States.

President Lyndon Johnson once observed that America is "*not merely a nation ... but a nation of nations.*" Today, our Nation draws much of its strength from this nation of nations, and the diversity within our borders. And Hispanic-Americans are prominent in the American mosaic.

Today, Hispanics are among America's most dynamic and vibrant constituencies. Hispanic influence and style pulses across our nation. Hispanic Americans are leaders in business and politics, sports and entertainment. Today, Hispanic Americans are weaving strands into the fabric of our national culture.

America's Hispanic community also looms as a significant political force. You are making history in the House and the Senate as, increasingly, the Congressional roster reflects the surnames of Hispanic-Americans. Hispanic Americans are voting in ever-larger numbers, too. Candidates for elected office are courting the Hispanic vote at the local ... state ... and federal levels.

Hispanic economic power is also flourishing. From the neighborhood grocery to the food-processing giant of Goya Foods ... the entrepreneurial spirit in the Hispanic community is helping energize the American economy.

And then there is the indomitable commitment to family, community and country. Especially country. We need only to look at the names engraved on the Wall at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Or consider the names of the three soldiers held captive in Kosovo in 1999 ... names like Stone, Gonzales and Ramirez.

Consider the names of the 40 Hispanic heroes who received our Nation's highest military honor — the Medal of Honor. Or consider the one million Hispanic veterans the Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to serve.

I want to take this opportunity to thank each of you for all of the outstanding work that you do in support of our Nation's 25 million living veterans and their families and survivors.

We appreciate your support of VA's mission "... to care for those who have borne the battle." We could not carry out that mission without your strong support, advocacy and volunteer service.

Today I want to tell you about some of the progress we have made at VA on behalf of veterans. But before I do that, I want to back up for a moment and talk about two Hispanic veterans whose stories have reached out to me in compelling ways.

A World War Two Private

In 1946, after serving in World War II, a young veteran enrolled in The Catholic University of America, located in Washington, D.C. He used education benefits he received under the GI Bill to earn a degree in mechanical engineering. After graduation, he was reluctant to join the family business where he had packed olives as a boy.

This young man was drafted within a month of graduating from high school in 1943. Once in the Army, he trained for armored infantry and was sent to the European Theater as a

gunner in the 11th Armored Division. He landed in France in December 1944 ... just before the Battle of the Bulge. His unit joined General Patton's Third Army at the Battle of the Bulge. He recalls that they lost half their company in the first 10 days.

This young man had his own brush with death on his first day in the European Theater. Though his sergeant lay dead amid intense German shelling, the young PFC pulled his men to safety and earned a Bronze Star for his heroics.

After the war, young Mr. Unanue graduated from Catholic University and passed on his first job offer. He felt he should be making more money than he was offered, so he went to work for his father at half the price. Today he has transformed that family business into a multi-million dollar concern, GOYA Foods, which distributes nearly 1,000 fine food products worldwide.

Story of Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez (USMC)

The story of Joseph Unanue has a different ending than that of a young Lance Corporal named Jose Gutierrez. Joseph Unanue returned from World War Two and put his GI benefits and training to good use. Corporal Gutierrez didn't live long enough to take advantage of his GI benefits.

He was born in Guatemala. After hopping 14 freight trains and hitchhiking through Mexico, this young man, all of 14, arrived in the United States with a strong faith in God ... but without documentation. He was placed in a series of foster homes. He learned English and completed high school. At 18 he received his residency documents.

Gutierrez liked to talk about becoming an architect. But he put his college plans on hold so that he could join the Marine Corps. He said that "he wanted to give the United States what the United States gave to him. He came with nothing. This country gave him everything."

Jose Gutierrez wanted to give something back. So last September he became a rifleman in the Marine Corps. During an attempt to seize control of the Iraqi port city of Umm Qasr, Jose Gutierrez became one of the first two Marines killed in combat in Iraq.

His older sister says that she does "feel proud because not just anyone gives up their life for another country." But she says that her brother's death makes her sad "because he fought for something that wasn't his."

Many of you here today have made sacrifices for our country, and you may have experienced a similar sadness. Perhaps you have felt the sting that comes with devotion to duty overseas, only to experience injustice and indignity here at home.

But you are sitting here today. No doubt you have that same optimism ... that same faith in God that PFC Unanue or Corporal Gutierrez had.

Many of you overcame unimaginable odds ... to build a life for yourself and for your loved ones. And in doing so, you have given something back to America. You are passing on a priceless legacy of courage, love of country and belief in a higher purpose.

The two life histories I've just recounted are heroic in one sense, and for Corporal Gutierrez, also tragic. There are other men whose names are no doubt familiar to you. Men like Fernando Luis Garcia, who was born in Puerto Rico and served as a Marine in Korea.

Garcia threw himself on a hand grenade and absorbed the full impact of the explosion with his body. In giving his life for his country, he saved precious lives of his comrades in Company I.

Or men like Alfred Rascon, born in Chihuahua, Mexico, who risked his life in Vietnam to rescue fellow soldiers on the battlefield.

Both Garcia and Rascon received the Congressional Medal of Honor. I am sure you will agree with me that their honor is our honor. Their service sets an example for all to follow. An example of selfless sacrifice. A commitment to a higher purpose.

And because of the dedication and devotion to duty of the Rascons and the Garcias and the Unanues and the Gutierrez's, your Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to providing our nation's veterans with the best possible healthcare and benefits possible. Let me tell you about some of the progress that VA has made in just the last three and a half years.

VA's Commitment to Healthcare

We are better prepared to meet the needs of our World War II and Korean War veterans with the finest in health care ... compassionate and common-sense prescription delivery ... and accelerated claims responses.

We are no less ready to provide our Vietnam and Gulf War veterans with health care that is second to none, and compensation benefits recognizing many of the unique health hazards they may have encountered during their service. And, we are prepared to meet the needs of our young men and women returning from the war on terrorism.

President Bush and Secretary Principi are committed to assuring our men and women in uniform can make a seamless transition from military service to civilian life.

Secretary Principi remains dedicated to ensuring that our nation's servicemen and women, as they make the transition to civilian life, are aware of ... and have access to ... all the VA health care resources they have earned.

The Bush Administration's 2005 budget will fund high quality care for veterans returning from overseas conflicts, and through our extensive outreach programs will ensure they know where to turn when they need our assistance.

Care for Returning OEF and OIF Veterans

As the most seriously wounded soldiers return stateside to Walter Reed Army Hospital or to Bethesda Naval Medical Center, VA representatives are there on site to help them transition to the healthcare program at the VA medical center most convenient to the community where they will live.

Any soldier returning stateside may go to any VA Medical Center to report physical ailments he or she believes are related to their service in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. They will receive medical treatment for two years without cost. And for service-connected medical conditions, they will receive medical treatment for the rest of their lives.

It is our job to make sure that their medical and health care needs are met, and we are currently engaged in a massive outreach program to ensure that service-members know what VA can do for them.

Last year for example, we began placing Veterans Service Representatives and Social Workers at key military installations where wounded service members are sent from field hospitals in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, we have VA liaison offices supporting 136 military installations. VA representatives in Germany work closely with the staff at the Landstuhl Army Medical Center to assist injured service members being treated there. As part of the DoD-VA sharing program, service personnel can get a single joint separation medical examination that meets both active duty separation and VA disability claim requirements. We call this 'Benefits Delivery at Discharge,' a service that is now available at 28 military installations.

One of the foundations for our success is the present administration's support of an increased budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Last year's VA budget represented the largest percentage increase of any federal department other than DoD. And it was the highest percentage increase in VA's history.

Our proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2005 reflects the President's and Secretary Principi's continuing commitment to America's veterans. If passed as expected, VA's budget will have grown by more than 40 percent during the past three and a half years.

Outreach to Former POWs

I want to talk again about one of Secretary Principi's top priorities. And that is outreach to our Nation's former prisoners of war. You heard my explanation earlier this morning.

I call on you, the members of American GI Forum, to join with us in our effort to seek out our former POWs and let them know that VA, on behalf of the American people, is waiting to honor our commitment to them.

A Word about CARES

We are responding to changing demographics in the veteran population. We recognize that veterans are moving and retiring in different areas of the country. VA is committed to a comprehensive 20-year plan called CARES, which stands for "Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services."

The CARES initiative will help us update those VA facilities that are underutilized or out of date. We will begin redirecting the millions that we spend on maintaining some of our buildings, and use those funds to modernize our facilities ... build new ones ... and expand our network of state-of-the-art outpatient clinics.

Through CARES, we will expand our outreach to homebound veterans and rural veterans through cutting-edge technologies like telehealth, telemedicine, and teleradiology.

We are determined to address veterans' health care needs with a minimum of travel while retaining the high-quality services of medical specialists. With CARES as our plan of action, we are undertaking what will certainly be the most fundamental redesign of VA's health care system in more than a half century.

Next, I would like to tell you about some of VA's benefits programs, including compensation, and then say a word about our national cemeteries.

VA Benefits Programs

VA's benefits programs allow us to make a payment on the debt owed to our Nation's defenders. Until recently, the process by which VA responded to veterans claims for disability for their hard-earned compensation and pension benefits was slow. We have changed all that.

Secretary Principi came into office determined to reduce VA's inventory of rating related claims. That determination has paid off. By the end of last fiscal year, we reduced our inventory of rating-related claims by 41%. We accomplished that by increasing the number of claims decisions we make each month from 40,000 to 68,000.

That's a monthly increase of 70 percent. At the same time we reduced the average time to render a decision from nearly eight months to less than six. And these impressive gains were achieved despite the fact that we still receive more than 60,000 new claims each month.

To put this in better perspective, over the past three years the number of rating claims VA completed annually rose from 481,000 in Fiscal Year 2001 to 827,000 in Fiscal Year 2003.

Compensation

Let's talk about compensation for just a moment. For the first time in more than a century, the President signed legislation allowing concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability benefits. This is an enormous step forward.

And to my mind, this is the right thing to do for the men and women who served our country well, and whose disabilities deserve fair and uncompromising benefits and healthcare. Going beyond financial compensation, VA offers vocational rehabilitation programs that encourage disabled veterans to establish their own goals for re-entering the work force, whether that means finding a meaningful job or starting their own business.

Our Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization works with businesses owned by veterans or the disabled in qualifying them for, and obtaining contracts from VA. We want more veterans to know about this program.

Each year we work to increase the number of contracts going to these businesses. We want to help disabled veterans achieve self-sufficiency.

Our vocational rehabilitation programs, for example, are all about pride, dignity and a feeling of accomplishment. We believe in supporting those young men and women who put their dreams on hold and went to serve their country.

Every year, VA helps 400,000 active duty service members and veterans with education benefits. They are attending college and trade schools. They are getting valuable training and developing new skills. They are combining those new skills with a strong work ethic and making an impact in the work force.

Every day, more than 700 veterans and active duty service members become first-time homeowners through our home loan program.

The National Cemetery Administration

VA is not only health care and benefits. We also honor our veterans in their final rest. Last year, 90,000 veterans were interred in one of VA's 120 national cemeteries.

In addition to the cemetery we recently dedicated at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, five more will open across the nation by the end of 2005. VA's new budget provides funds for advance planning of six more cemeteries ... each a *National Shrine* to the service and sacrifice of America's armed forces.

I want you to know that VA is not running out of burial space. In fact, when these new cemeteries open, this administration will have expanded the capacity of our National Cemeteries by 85%. This is the largest expansion of our National Cemeteries since the Civil War.

It is an honor for me to be here with you today. I want to say, on behalf of President Bush, Secretary Principi, and the 220,000 men and women who stand tall to serve veterans at VA facilities every day ... we are unwavering in our commitment to honor Lincoln's promise "to care for those who have borne the battle."

This is our solemn pledge to you. Your country appreciates your dedicated and selfless service. We are committed to providing you with the finest healthcare and the benefits that you deserve.

We are proud of the fact that more than one fourth of VA's employees, nearly 60,000 men and women, are veterans.

Veterans serving veterans.

I think that you will appreciate these words from Joseph Unanue, World War Two veteran and CEO of a multi-million dollar corporation. At the age of 78 he said "It's important to help yourself and your heritage, but it's equally important to help the country, in the business sense, as well." I think you can see that he still has that philosophy, that commitment ... to giving back.

Together, you and I must give back to our nation. Together, the American GI Forum and the Department of Veterans Affairs can help keep America strong.

This is another part of the legacy of freedom and democracy that each of us has maintained for future generations.

The legacy we have maintained for future generations of Americans like the late Corporal Jose Gutierrez, who wrote in a piece that he titled "Letter to God" -- "Thank you for permitting me to live another year. Thank you for what I have, for the type of person I am, and for my dreams that don't die. May the firearms be silent and the teachings of love flourish."

By the way, you will be interested to know that Corporal Gutierrez was granted American citizenship posthumously. He is one of more than 8,000 immigrants who have received American citizenship under an Executive Order signed by President Bush that expedites naturalization for immigrants serving in an active-duty status in the U.S. Armed Forces during the period of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Again. Thank you veterans. Thank you for your love of country ... and for your dedicated service to our nation.

May God bless you always.

Statement by Michael J. Kussman, M.D.
Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Health
Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Total Force
Hearing on Force Health Protection and Surveillance
February 25, 2004

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss efforts of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) toward a seamless transition for separating service members from the Department of Defense (DoD) health care system to the VA health care system.

We have been working hard both internally and with DoD to identify the men and women returning from combat theaters and to provide those separated from active duty, particularly those injured or with deployment related illnesses, with world-class VA service. Anyone who has been wounded or injured or has become ill while in defense of our country deserves the highest quality and most timely service possible from their Government.

Working with DoD, VA has accomplished and put into place a number of strategies, policies, and procedures to provide timely, appropriate services to our returning service members.

Seamless Transition Activities

Last August, VA's Under Secretary for Benefits and Under Secretary for Health created a new VA Taskforce for the Seamless Transition of Returning Service Members to reduce red tape and streamline access to all VA benefits. This taskforce, composed of VA senior leadership from key program offices and the VA/DoD Executive Council structure, focused initially on internal coordination efforts to ensure that VA approaches this mission in a comprehensive manner. In the process, we have improved dialogue and collaboration between our two Departments.

Points of Contact

Through the leadership of the Taskforce, each Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facility and each VA regional office has identified a point of contact to coordinate activities locally and to assure that the needs of returning service members and veterans are met and that additional contact is made should the veteran relocate. VA has distributed guidance on case management services to VHA and VBA field staff to ensure proper coordination processes and that our expectations are communicated and followed. The guidance also addresses the roles and functions of the points of contact and case managers. VHA has recently revised its guidance to reflect recent experiences at field stations. The revised guidance will be distributed this month. Working in collaboration with the military Surgeons General, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has detailed two full-time Veterans Service Representatives and VHA has detailed two full-time social workers to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the military treatment facility (MTF) receiving the largest numbers of casualties. Beginning in late August 2003, full-time and part-time VHA social workers and VBA Veterans Service Representatives have also been assigned as VA/DoD liaisons to the Brooke, Eisenhower, and Madigan Army Medical Centers, Darnall Army Community Hospital at Fort Hood, and the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. They work closely with military medical providers and DoD social workers to assure that returning service members receive information and counseling about VA benefits and programs, as well as assistance in filing benefit claims. They also coordinate the transfer of active duty service members and recently discharged veterans to appropriate VA health care

facilities. Through this collaboration, we have improved our ability to identify and serve returning service members that sustained serious injuries or illnesses while serving our country. Over 1,100 hospitalized soldiers have received assistance from VA social workers.

Outreach Activities

VA actively participates in discharge planning and orientation sessions for returning service members, and we have expanded our collaboration with DoD to enhance outreach to returning members of the Reserves and National Guard. Working with DoD Health Affairs and DoD Reserve Affairs, we developed a new brochure, "A Summary of VA Benefits for National Guard and Reserve Personnel." The brochure summarizes the benefits available to this group of veterans upon their return to civilian life. We have distributed over a million copies of the brochure to ensure the widest possible dissemination through VA and DoD channels. It is also available online at <http://www.va.gov/environagents/docs/SVABENEFITS.pdf> and http://www.defenselink.mil/r2/mobile/pdf/va_benefits_rs.pdf. During FY 2003, VBA conducted over 800 briefings attended by almost 47,000 reserve and guard members. During the 1st quarter of FY 2004, 317 briefings were conducted and were attended by more than 18,000 reserve and guard members.

Outreach activities include the distribution of flyers, posters, and information brochures to VA medical centers, regional offices, and Vet Centers. All of these publications explain VA services available to veterans. As VA becomes aware of service members who are separated from the military, VA contacts them to welcome them home and explain what local VA services are available. Furthermore, in order to make a wide selection of general information available to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans online, we have created a direct "Iraqi Freedom" link from VA's Internet page (www.vba.va.gov/EFIF). This new site provides information on VA benefits, including health and mental health services, DoD benefits, and community resources available to regular active duty service members, activated members of the Reserves and National Guard, veterans, and veterans' family members.

A critical concern for veterans and their families is the potential for adverse health effects related to military deployments. VA has produced a brochure that addresses the main health concerns for military service in Afghanistan, another brochure for the current conflict in Iraq, and one recently distributed on health care for women veterans returning from the Gulf region. These brochures answer health-related questions that veterans, their families, and health care providers have about these hazardous military deployments. They also describe relevant medical care programs that VA has developed in anticipation of the health needs of veterans returning from combat and peacekeeping missions abroad. These are widely distributed to military contacts and veterans service representatives; they can also be found on VA's website. Another concern is the potential health impact of environmental exposures during deployment. Veterans often have questions about their symptoms and illnesses following deployment. VA generally addresses these concerns through such media as newsletters and fact-sheets, regular briefings to veterans' service organizations, national meetings on health and research issues, media interviews, educational materials, and websites, like www.va.gov/environagents.

As a new initiative recently requested by Secretary Principi, VA will shortly begin to send "thank-you" letters together with information brochures to each OIF and OEF veteran. These letters will provide information on health care and other VA benefits, toll-

free information numbers, and appropriate VA web sites for accessing additional information.

Training and Education

To ensure that our commitment is understood and shared at every level of the Department, the Taskforce developed a number of training materials and other tools for front line staff to ensure that they can identify veterans who have served in a theater of combat operations and take the steps necessary to ensure the veterans receive appropriate care.

To further aid VA employees in their efforts to assist OIF/OEF veterans, we have recently distributed a video entitled "Our Turn to Serve" to all VHA and VBA field facilities. The video helps VA staff better understand the experiences of military personnel serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and explains how they can provide the best possible service to these newest combat veterans. We have also provided copies of this video to Military Treatment Facilities. Additionally, we have created a web page for VA employees on the activities of the VA Seamless Transition Task Force. Included are lists of points of contact for all VHA health care facilities and VBA regional offices, copies of all applicable directives and policies, press releases, brochures, posters, Task Force minutes, and resource information.

The Veterans Health Initiative (VHI) is a program designed to increase recognition of the connection between military service and certain health effects; better document veterans' military and exposure histories; improve patient care; and establish a database for further study. The education component of VHI prepares VA healthcare providers to better serve their patients. A module was created on "Treating War Wounded," adapted from VHA satellite broadcasts in April 2003 and designed to assist VA clinicians in managing the clinical needs of returning wounded from the war in Iraq. Modules on spinal cord injury, cold injury, traumatic amputation, Agent Orange, the Gulf War, PTSD, POW, blindness/visual impairment and hearing loss, and radiation are also available. Training modules on infectious disease risks in Southwest Asia and on Weapons of Mass Destruction were released in January 2004. We are developing additional modules on military sexual trauma, traumatic brain injury, and pulmonary diseases of military occupational significance. In addition to the VHA training modules on PTSD, VA's National Center for PTSD has developed the Iraq War Clinician's Guide for use across VA. The website version, which can be found at WWW.NCPTSD.ORG, contains the latest fact sheets and available medical literature and is updated regularly. The first version of the Iraq War Guide was published in June 2003. It is now being revised in collaboration with DoD based on our experience with returning casualties. These important tools are integrated with other VA educational efforts to enable VA practitioners to arrive at a diagnosis more quickly and accurately and to provide more effective treatment.

VA Health Care

Mr. Chairman, veterans who have served or are now serving in Afghanistan and Iraq may enroll in the VA health care system and, for a two-year period following the date of their separation from active duty, would receive VA health care without co-payment requirements for conditions that are or may be related to their combat service. Following this initial two-year period, they may continue their enrollment in the VA health care system but may become subject to any applicable co-payment requirements. Based on lists of separated OIF and OEF veterans received from DoD, we estimate that

as of December 2003, 9,753 OIF veterans and 1,798 OEF veterans had received health care from VA for a wide variety of health problems.

For returning service members who are experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, VA has programs specifically developed to assess and address emotional and behavioral problems associated with the military experience. The training programs cited above will ensure that our skilled clinicians will be better able to identify and treat problems presented by the newest generation of combat veterans. The VHI module on PTSD in Primary Care mentioned above is designed to increase recognition of PTSD in medical primary care settings. Within these mental health programs, VA operates a comprehensive continuum of clinical care for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in its Medical Centers and clinics. This is accomplished both through special PTSD programs and through PTSD specialists in general mental health programs.

VA's Vet Centers also play an important role complementing VA health care services. Our mental health clinical activities are linked to and supportive of Vet Center activities. Vet Center staff members actively pursue outreach to military installations and family support centers to assist veterans and their families in the veterans' return to civilian life. Last year, Vet Centers began extending readjustment counseling services to all OEF and OIF veterans. As of December 2003 Vet centers had served 4,300 of these veterans.

Clinical Tools

Earlier I discussed the Veterans Health Initiative (VHI) as a program designed to increase recognition of the connection between military service and certain health effects. VA has also developed additional tools to assist the clinician when treating OIF and OEF veterans.

A screening instrument in the form of a clinical reminder triggered by the veteran's separation date is being implemented for returning OIF and OEF veterans who come to VA for health care. This assessment tool will prompt the provider with specific screening requirements to assure that veterans are evaluated for medical and psychological conditions that may be related to recent combat deployment.

VA has also developed evidence-based clinical approaches for treating veterans following deployment. These clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) give health care providers the needed structure, clinical tools, and educational resources that allow them to diagnose and manage patients with deployment-related health concerns. Two post-deployment CPGs have been developed in collaboration with DoD, a general purpose post-deployment CPG and a CPG for unexplained fatigue and pain. Our goal is that all veterans will find their VA doctors well informed about specific deployments and related health hazards. The VA website contains these CPGs as well as information about unique deployment health risks and new treatments.

VA and DoD will release a new CPG on the management of traumatic stress by the end of this month. This guideline pools DoD and VA expertise to help build a joint assessment and treatment infrastructure between the two systems in order to coordinate primary care and mental health care for the purpose of managing, and, if possible, preventing acute and chronic Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Record Sharing between VA and DoD.

VA and DoD are also collaborating to develop the ability to share medical information electronically. Since June 2002, the Departments have successfully been sharing electronic medical information. Key initiatives in the Electronic Health Records Plan are the Federal Health Information Exchange (FHIE) and HealthePeople (Federal). FHIE provides historical data on separated and retired military personnel from the DOD's

Composite Health Care System to the FHIE Data Repository for use in VA clinical encounters and potential future use in aggregate analysis. Patient data on laboratory results, radiology reports, outpatient pharmacy information, and patient demographics are now being sent from DoD to VA via secure messaging. This second phase of FHIE has been deployed and is operational at VA medical centers nationwide. It includes admission, discharge, transfer data, discharge summaries, allergies, and consult tracking. Most recently, additional enhancements were completed to provide retail pharmacy data from the DoD Pharmacy Data Transaction Service. Work on the final release of FHIE is on target to provide Standard Ambulatory Data Record information to VA. FHIE is scheduled to go into maintenance mode at the end of the second quarter FY 2004. The next Phase of the Plan will provide bi-directional exchange of health data between Departments. VA and DoD are developing prototype interoperable data repositories using standardized data that will demonstrate bi-directional data exchange with pharmacy information in October 2004. The Departments will achieve health system interoperability by October 2005.

We are also working with DoD to develop processes whereby pre- and post-deployment health assessments will be available electronically to VA physicians and claims examiners. We are further analyzing the HIPAA Privacy rule and its implications for our health information sharing efforts.

Summary

A service member separating from military service and seeking health care through VA today will have the benefit of VA's decade-long experience with Gulf War health issues as well as the President's commitment to improving collaboration between VA and DoD. VA has successfully adapted many existing programs, improved outreach, improved clinical care through practice guidelines and educational efforts, and improved VA health provider's access to DoD health records. Secretary Principi has emphasized VA's commitment to returning combat veterans. In his words, "We will have failed to meet our very reason to exist as a Department if a veteran is poorly served."

This concludes my statement. My colleagues and I will be happy to respond to any questions that you or other members of the Subcommittee might have.

Hon. Elijah Dane Clark
Chairman, Board of Veterans' Appeals
Remarks at Board of Veterans' Appeals Law Day Observance
Washington, DC
May 1, 2004

(An interactive motivational presentation made to high school students)

Good Morning!

Today I have the great pleasure and honor to share this time with some of the richest people in the world. Does anyone disagree with me? Let me guess what you are thinking.

You are probably thinking, "What about Bill Gates? What about the ruling family of Saudi Arabia? What about Oprah Winfrey?" Let me see the hands of those who are thinking along those lines. [Pause.]

Let's talk about why it is that, when we think of riches we almost automatically think of money and material things. This is a cultural phenomenon. We are socialized to think materially.

When we limit our thoughts to money and material things we are thinking about wealth, not riches. A dictionary definition of "wealth" is "abundance of valuable material possessions or resources." A dictionary definition of "riches" is much broader. "Riches" may be defined to include "precious possessions."

Now, who will tell me what are the precious possessions that make this audience such a rich gathering?

[Allow brief responses. Recognize that youth, time, and potential are precious possessions. Give a prize for comments.]

If I were to assign a theme to this time I'm sharing with you, it would be "You Never Know."

I will now share with you a fact that some of you will find unbelievable: [Pause]

I was once your age!

I once had the riches of a very promising future stretched out ahead of me.

One of the great pleasures of my life is that I have lived a dream that far exceeds what I expected when I was your age.

A week ago I was attending the graduation exercises at the University of Maryland, University College. The Commencement Speaker grew up in circumstances somewhat similar to mine. He grew up in a poverty-stricken, single-parent household in a city. I grew up in a poverty-stricken two-parent household in the country. A week ago he was receiving an honorary Doctor of Public Service Degree, one of many honorary doctorates that have been bestowed upon him. Also, he has an earned Doctor of Medicine degree. His name is Dr. Benjamin S. Carson, Jr.

Can anyone tell me something about Dr. Benjamin Carson?

[Brief interaction. (Director of the Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery and professor of neurosurgery, oncology, plastic surgery, and pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.)]

When I was growing up in Alabama, in a family of ten children, on a cotton plantation of sharecroppers, the prospect of merely graduating from high school seemed a dream far beyond my grasp. My father completed sixth grade; my mother the eighth.

When my older brother and I would be walking the mile and a half along the muddy wagon road between our house and the four-room school for kindergarten

through 9th grade, to us college was something for the kids who lived in town, not for kids like us, who spent most of the school year working in the fields. College was for kids who had more than one pair of shoes.

When I finally got to high school, two years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, it was by riding a bus about five miles past the high school for white kids, to a group of ramshackle wooden buildings deep in the woods, alongside a railroad track. The last semester of my senior year we were moved into a new school in town, but it was still a segregated and inherently inferior school.

[What was the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?]

Fortunately, I always loved reading. I loved nearly everything about school. Once you've worked in a cotton field, you have to love school. Anything was preferable to working in a cotton field.

[Describe working in cotton field.]

Although I had been absent nearly half the school days, I still had good grades because I would catch up on assignments during lunch and during daytime athletic events.

I graduated number 3 in a class of 52. I was barely 16 years old. (I had skipped a couple grades in elementary and middle school.) I still had no thoughts of going to college. At that time my older brother and I were the first in our extended family to graduate from high school.

Fortunately, one of my teachers, Miss Hudson, decided that I should go to college. (What else was I going to do at 16?) I had scored well on the standardized tests, so she contacted some people she knew, and one day she came to the field where I was working and told me that there was an opening at Stillman College, the Dean of Admissions had agreed to accept me, and she had a friend who would rent me a room.

I had no idea where the money would come from. I had not even looked at any college catalogs or visited any college campuses. I had not sent out a single college application. Miss Hudson handed me the application form and waited while I completed it and signed it.

At the end of the first semester I had the highest GPA in the freshman class, and was a member of the honor society.

But, getting from Aliceville, Alabama, to Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals was still far beyond my most fantastic dreams. Even among Black college graduates in Alabama in 1963, career choices were very limited. The majority of my classmates went into teaching, preaching, or small entrepreneurial businesses. There were no Black law schools in Alabama, and we were not allowed to attend the white ones. So I took the well-traveled road of teaching in high school.

I began my teaching career in Quitman, Mississippi. During my interview with the school superintendent he gave me my first lesson on the political realities of *Brown v. Board of Education*. He told me that whatever I'd heard about the *Brown* case, I should keep in mind that this was Mississippi.

Every time I think of *Brown* I think of that conversation. Here was the senior education official in Clarke County Mississippi telling me that the Supreme Court of the United States had said that he should integrate the schools, but he was not going to do it.

I believe that was when I first started thinking about law school.

Nevertheless, I taught two years in Quitman, Mississippi, two years in Butler, Alabama, and a year in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. By then I had earned a masters degree in modern romance languages. Then I decided to go into a more peaceful line of work.

Can anyone guess what I did next?

[Acknowledge correct responder.]

That's right. I joined the Marines.

During the late sixties, the military was a somewhat turbulent place to be. But it was merely a reflection of the times we were experiencing. The war in Vietnam was very hot. Opposition to the war was very strong. There were civil disturbances in many of the cities. It was a time of peace and love, of flower power, of tuning in, turning on, and dropping out, but also of racial unrest, political disenfranchisement, and talk of a generation gap.

Although President Truman had integrated the military in 1948, there was still a glaring racial imbalance in the senior leadership. Consequently, many of the young Black enlisted servicemen and -women did not feel that they could expect fair treatment for promotions, for assignments, and especially in military justice.

In the early seventies I was an infantry officer in Okinawa, Japan. During those years, a disproportionate number of Black Marines were charged with crimes, sometimes based upon a mere cultural misunderstanding of self-expression. Often the Black Marines would want a Black lawyer to represent them. Unfortunately, on Okinawa, there were no Black Marine lawyers.

As a rifle company executive officer, I had gained the confidence of some of the Marines who knew me. So, many of these young Marines would seek me out for advice and guidance. Although I could not represent them in court, I could and did try to guide them with what experience, maturity, and judgment I had.

This is when I started making plans to go to law school.

I didn't start law school until two years after I left active duty in the Marines. In the intervening years I taught French at Alcorn State University in Mississippi.

By this time the Marine Corps and the Navy still had a racial imbalance among their lawyers. During an exercise with the Marine Corps Reserves the spring before I started law school my commanding officer asked why I didn't come back into the Marine Corps as a lawyer. I took his advice, applied for and was accepted in the Excess Leave Program (Law). A couple weeks after I moved to the University of Mississippi to begin law school, a telegram from the Commandant of the Marine Corps welcomed me back to active duty in the Marine Corps.

My first assignment after completing law school and the Naval Justice School was as a defense counsel. So, after six years I could officially represent Marines in court as I had been asked to do on Okinawa in 1971.

[What does a defense counsel do?]

During the twenty-one years of active duty after law school I spent most of my time in military justice. I was a defense counsel, a chief defense counsel, a senior defense counsel, an appellate government counsel, a trial judge four times, and an appellate judge. I also spent more than two years as a Chief Legal Assistance officer.

Which of these many and varied assignments contributed most to preparing me for my present position?

[Elicit responses.]

I hope that you will discover, as I have discovered, that all of your life experiences contribute to your present, as you never know what the future will bring.

When Dr. Carson was a temperamental, low-achieving student dreaming of becoming a doctor, he could not have envisioned being a world famous neurosurgeon, a highly respected medical educator, and best-selling author. But, you never know.

Even when I was in law school, contemplating becoming a skillful and successful trial lawyer, I did not anticipate the successes I have experienced in the legal profession. Most of all, I could not have anticipated the responsibilities of being Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals. But, you never know.

I guess you could say of both Dr Carson and of me, "Only in America!" That is part of what makes this a great country. Another thing that makes this a great country is the millions of veterans who have made tremendous sacrifices to make sure that this Country stays great.

[What does that involve? Talk about what the Board does, and how it does it.]

Many of you have very concrete and detailed plans for your future. Some of these plans may bear fruition exactly as planned. More likely, you will be continuously modifying your plans and your expectations as you gain experience, maturity, and knowledge. That is called growth.

Just as no one of you can predict the future, no one of you can plan for a particular future. Changes are occurring at such a rapid pace, that even futurologists can speak only in broad, sweeping generalities.

There is a rich and rewarding future awaiting each of you, if you are prepared to open the door when opportunity knocks. That is why it is important that you plan to prepare yourself to enable the future when it becomes your present.

Because, you never know.

Basil White
Information Technology Specialist
Office of Policies, Plans and Programs
Remarks Delivered to the Presidential Classroom
Georgetown University Conference Center, Washington, DC
February 3, 2004

Good evening. I'm delighted to meet you. What an opportunity to speak to two hundred of the best and brightest high school juniors and seniors from across the United States. I'm Basil White. I write and edit technology policy for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

You guys have had a long day, you've been to a few embassies, seen the sights, and just had some pizza, now it's time to have fun learning about Federal policy writing. No. No, I won't insult you like that. Policy is incredibly boring. Unless, and this is important, unless you care about the subject of the policy. The interesting part of policy writing is the questions that policies are supposed to answer, like "Who gets food stamps?" "What qualifies as an act of war?" "How do we treat soldiers with Gulf War Syndrome?"

Interesting questions. VA policy is full of important, profound questions about serving the veteran, so VA policy isn't a dry activity for me at all. It's solving a puzzle. It's getting from the current state to the end state, serving the veteran, in a way that doesn't violate principles or laws. I feel that policy work is a very American activity, because it's very American to want to serve people and play fair at the same time. Balancing service and fairness means you have to come up with some guidance for who, how, what, when where and why you're going to perform that service.

When I was in high school, I had no idea that I would even consider public service. I didn't know any Government employees. I didn't know how people became Government employees. I was just fortunate that I had experience and education that prepared me for the opportunity of public service.

I was concerned that Federal work would be kind of boring and uninspiring. I was dead wrong. Federal employees are creative people. We have to keep asking the big questions every day: who, what, how, when, where, and why. And we have to serve every day. The Government is open for business twenty-four hours a day in some capacity somewhere. And to serve, we have to change and reinvent ourselves as the who, what, how, when, where and why changes.

VA Headquarters has two plaques on the outside wall with a quote from Lincoln's second inaugural address - "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan." I tell people I love working at a place where the mission statement is embossed in metal on the building. When I get in a debate with someone who seems to have lost that focus, I invite them to come outside with me and read the building. Priorities at work don't get a lot clearer than that.

That sense of purpose is strong at VA, but I feel it from other agencies, too. I had an interview once for the Department of Agriculture. One out of three Americans receives food every day because of some Department of Agriculture program. Agriculture employees know why they do what they do. I walked in the foyer of the office, and both sides of the foyer were covered with framed posters of children eating food. That's a work environment with a clear purpose.

I get four weeks of vacation every year. In five years I'll get six weeks of vacation. It's a great benefit, but there are reasons for it. I feel that the Government tries to keep its employees from working in a constant crisis mode so we can work

consistently, creatively, and at top form. I've worked in private industry, and my private industry job moved me from crisis to crisis. Systems in constant crisis fail.

Individual private enterprises can fail, but the Government cannot afford to fail. We have to be more versatile than that. We have to be smarter. We have to adjust. That means we need time to be able to think.

I get a little more free time and I work in crisis mode less often than I would expect as a private industry employee. What I give back is creativity, problem-solving, peak performance, and an attitude of trying to leave my work situation a little better than when I found it. I couldn't do this if I was in constant crisis, and the Government knows that. I'm fortunate to have a schedule and an environment that allows me to think and be creative. I didn't make straight A's. I wasn't a distinguished scholar, but I've been able to create some work of distinction because of the patience and guidance I've received as a Federal employee.

You're the cream of the crop. You wouldn't be in this room otherwise. What distinguishes top performers is a person who creates plans and executes plans. My guess is that all of you can think of a time when you had a goal, you took the initiative to write down a plan, you worked your plan, and you succeeded. That's a core skill of Federal policy work, and of Federal employees. I feel that a lot of what's allowed me to develop as a VA employee is an environment where I can motivate myself, and write and execute my own plan for self-development.

The other panelists talked about how you need political skill to perform and develop as a Government professional inside the Beltway. They're right, but that doesn't mean you have to be politically savvy on day one. When I came here, I had no political savvy. I was just another redneck from East Memphis. I had to learn political skills on the job. But I got some good advice from a psychology professor. How many of you are taking or have taken a journalism class? You know the six infinite adverbs, who, what, when, where, why, how? My professor taught me that people who succeed in new social systems are people who observe the system, hang back for a while, find an "old gray dog" who knows the unwritten rules of the system, and ask them who, what, when, where, how and why questions about the system.

You guys are students, so I'm going to share some things that happened to me as a student that helped me later on in Federal service. When I was a freshman, I looked at the requirements to graduate. Like at my college, many schools have a minimum amount of upper-level courses you have to take in your major, and a minimum amount of upper-level courses that you can take in any subject you want. I realized that if I took all of my upper-division courses in one department, I could get a double major without taking any extra courses, so I took nothing but technical writing electives and earned a second major in technical writing with no extra work. It also made me competitive for jobs in two fields.

My second major was technical writing. Here's why. I saw a chart in the campus advisor's office that listed the effect of a second major on salary. In other words, for everyone who double-majored in Biology and something else, and got a job in whatever the other major was, what was the income effect of getting a second major in Biology. The chart listed dozens of second majors by salary effect. Having any second major boosted all salaries, but the second major with the greatest salary effect was technical writing. Thinking about it, it makes sense. I feel that the more a group depends on technology, the more that group's success and failure depends on how well the group communicates to itself and about itself. If I'm choosing a college graduate for an entry-level job, whether it's a car salesman or lawyer or an accountant, and my pool of applicants have college degrees in the field but one has a technical writing double major, I'd lean toward that person, because they can write a presentation, or a proposal, or

advertising copy, or procedural instructions, and that output helps organizations to survive and thrive.

All of you are high-achieving students, so you may already do what I'm about to describe. I went to an open-admissions public university, and I didn't feel that the school made a commitment to my personal success. College professors keep office hours. I would go to their office, told them what I wanted to be when I grew up, and asked them what they thought I should do to achieve my goals. Some teachers took a direct interest in my success, gave me great ideas for papers, connected me with colleagues outside of the university, and I even got a paying research job from one of these conversations. This taught me that people can't help me with my goals if I keep my goals a secret, and that the best mentoring relationship is when I make it clear that all I want from the mentor is advice, I don't ask the mentor to act on my behalf, and I take full responsibility for the consequences of taking their advice.

The organizer of this event asked me to talk about the greatest reward of Federal service. For me, my greatest reward is that I never have to wonder if my work has meaning. I've been able to help veterans and their families by constantly improving and applying my knowledge, skills and abilities. Sometimes in my personal life I'll meet a veteran and talk about what I do in the VA, and they'll say "thank you." Millions of people thank veterans for their service to our country, but I never thought I'd have the honor of hearing a veteran thanking me for my service to them. That moves me to tears. It gives me the shakes thinking about it. I'm not special. I'm not elite. I've just been able to do some good work because of what other people have given me as a Federal employee. You guys are elite, much more than I was in high school. If you want to leave your country and your workplace a little better than you found it, no enterprise will reward you for those values better than public service.

Some people think that Government service is cushy work that you don't have to do much once you're in the system. I think there are people in any enterprise who do "just enough," but if you want to identify the people in a group who are self-motivated, the individuals in that group must be able to choose between performing at the minimum or taking the initiative to do more. Cream can't rise if you keep shaking the churn.

Every Federal employee I know does more than they have to. Furthermore, I know that when Federal employees distinguish themselves, they do so because they motivate themselves to do more. Those are the people I want running the country. People of distinction. People like you.

Thank you for letting me have the opportunity to speak, and thank you for listening.

Betty Moseley-Brown
Outreach Coordinator, Veterans Benefits Administration
Remarks at VACO Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Observance
Jan 15, 2004

In celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, I honor Dr. King as a great orator. Today I'll share thoughts on:

- 1 – What is a great orator?
- 2 – Written versus Spoken words.
- 3 – Remembering Dr. King

There are few speeches known by title like "I have a dream"

There are few people whose father; grandfather, great-grandfather and brother were all preachers.

There is only one Martin Luther King Jr.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT ORATOR?

To the Greeks, oratory was among the noblest of arts and oration was the aristocrat of public speaking.

Today, many will agree that a great oration produces an effect of eloquence, which is far above the ordinary. Dr. King's speaking was truly extraordinary and eloquent.

In August 1963, Dr. King prepared to speak at the March on Washington. From personal accounts, Dr. King had used the words "I have a dream" in previous sermons. But it was on this occasion, in front of dignitaries, celebrities, and the mass of ordinary men and women, that Dr. King began reading..."Five score years ago, a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation..." Dr. King later shared that he only read to a certain point and stopped. The emotion of the event led him to share his message, "I have a Dream." This great orator did an extraordinary thing by inspiring those who heard his message – not just on THAT day, but for all days to come.

WRITTEN WORDS VERSUS SPOKEN WORDS.

I recently read Dr. King's autobiography. His written words were letters on pages. I felt that something was missing. I searched out an audio collection of 12 sermons delivered by Dr. King from 1954 to 1963. Titles such as:

"The Three Dimensions of a Completed Life"

"Rediscovering Lost Values" and his final sermon at his home church, "Unfulfilled Dreams."

I heard what was missing on the pages, his TONE, his PREACHER'S PITCH, and his PASSION. Passion turned his words into MAGIC.

HOW DO WE REMEMBER DR. KING?

Magic are the words of Dr. King. Either in his role as minister and pastor, or as a Civil Rights Leader, Dr. King inspired his audiences and challenged them with a call to action.

In Unfulfilled Dreams, he gave guidelines for his eulogy. He said he didn't want to be remembered as a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, or that he had received hundreds of awards, or even what school he went to...

He wanted it said that he led a "committed life." He wanted to be called a Drum Major for Justice, righteousness and peace. He said "If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living will not be in vain."

I challenge you, wherever you work, whatever your dreams are to mirror this great orator's eloquence by leading a committed life, so our living will not be in vain.